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## Sorority Ritual Participation and Self-Efficacy

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# Mendez et al.: Sorority Ritual Participation and Self-Efficacy SORORITY RITUAL PARTICIPATION AND SELF-EFFICACY

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*This qualitative research study utilized a phenomenological approach to explore the relationship between sorority ritual and self-efficacy. Guided by Social Cognitive Theory, data were collected through focus groups and one-on-one interviews. This study provided new insights into the role of ritual participation on perceived increases in self-efficacy in college women. Implications for future research and practice also are discussed.*

*Keywords: ritual, self-efficacy, sorority, student involvement, education hazing in fraternities.*

Student involvement is a broad term referring to the “amount of physical and psychological energy that students devote to the academic experience” (Astin, 1999, p. 518), including coursework, living on campus, working on campus, faculty/student interaction, student organization involvement, athletic and student government participation, involvement in service learning projects, ROTC memberships, and campus event attendance (Astin, 1999; Kinzie, Gonyea, Kuh, Umbach, Blaich, & Korkmaz, 2007; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, & Bridges, 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Research has repeatedly demonstrated the positive benefits of student involvement on student learning and development, as involvement in co-curricular programs has been linked to higher student satisfaction ratings, increased retention, higher levels of well-being, and enhanced leadership development (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 2009; Lijana & Singh-Siddiqui, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). However, while most studies on student involvement have focused on traditional outcomes such as persistence, grades, or identity development (Bensimon, 2007; Foubert & Urbanski, 2006; Hernandez, Hogan, Hathaway, & Lovell, 1999; Kuh et al., 2006), exploration is needed into additional outcomes related to the emerging importance of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2005), such as self-efficacy, which is the belief that one can change the outcome of a situation (Bandura, 1982). Specifically how involvement contributes to positive

outcomes continues to be an area of exploration.

Involvement in sororities has been linked to increased self-efficacy (Saville & Johnson, 2007; Thompson, Oberle, & Lilley, 2011; Wilder, Hoyt, Surbeck, Wilder, & Carney, 1986), but the way in which sorority membership and involvement have contributed to students’ development of increased self-efficacy is unknown. Because self-efficacy in college has been connected to the outcomes of persistence (Friedman & Mandel, 2009) and student success (Krumrei-Mancuso, Newton, Kim, & Wilcox, 2013; Vuong, Brown-Welty, & Tracz, 2010; Wright, Jenkins-Guarnieri, & Murdock, 2013), exploring how sorority involvement specifically contributes to this important psychosocial factor can support the need for sorority opportunities in higher education.

Sorority membership is comprised of numerous aspects of the experience, including the development of sisterhood and community, philanthropy, leadership development, and ritual. Ritual is a unique aspect of the sorority experience, which involves participation in formalized ceremonies that communicate the values of the organization to new members, and integrates members into the group (Gusfield & Michalowicz, 1984; Hermanowicz & Morgan, 1999; Merelman, 1988; Rothenbuhler, 1998; Van Gennep, 2004). Because ritual is not typically a component of other types of student involvement experiences, this study sought to explore the influence of ritual on collegiate sorority women in

order to further understand the possible link between that experience and self-efficacy concepts.

As the connections between ritual and self-efficacy have not yet been examined, this study was intentionally limited to members of sororities to explore the unique lived experience of women in these Greek-letter organizations. Sororities are a prominent outlet for, and driver of, student involvement on college campuses; members tend to be heavily influenced by their shared culture, which is explicitly communicated through ritual. This study endeavored to contribute to the literature to advance understanding on how participation in sorority rituals, as the sense of community, the support structure, and the internalization of shared values, appears to increase self-efficacy among members.

### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of sorority membership and ritual participation on the development of self-efficacy in collegiate women. Ritual is a significant aspect of sorority life, one that has not been studied in relation to the construct of self-efficacy. This study attempted to answer the following research question: How does the sorority ritual experience contribute to the development of self-efficacy in women? Using a qualitative, phenomenological approach to the research design, data collection, and data analysis, this study explored self-efficacy development in women who participated in sorority rituals through the administration of focus groups and one-on-one interviews.

### Theoretical Framework: Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) was initiated by Dr. Albert Bandura (1991) and originated out of his earlier work on Social Learning Theory. This was a complex theory, which asserted that learning occurred through observing the behavior of others (Bandura & Barab, 1971). However, Bandura believed that learning involved more

than behaviorism. He theorized that personal beliefs about a situation were as important as the actual behaviors (Bandura, 2010). Those beliefs could be shaped by a variety of factors including the individuals' observations of events occurring around them.

SCT was founded in the agentic perspective (Bandura, 1986), which stated that individuals can be proactive in controlling their environment, rather than the environment controlling them. They are agents of change who can act accordingly. "They are contributors to their life circumstances, not just products of them" (Bandura, 1986, p. 9). The four key components of SCT are self-observation, self-evaluation, self-reaction, and self-efficacy. Self-observation involves the ability to accurately assess one's thoughts and behavior. It can both inform and motivate progress, resulting in behavioral changes. Self-evaluation occurs when individuals compare their performance to their standards and goals. Self-reaction is motivation garnered through one's reaction to events and is closely related to emotion. Self-efficacy, a focus of this study, is the expectation that one can master a situation and produce a positive outcome. The interaction of these four components promotes an agentic perspective, which enhances motivation and goal attainment (Redmond, 2010).

As SCT is broad, with self-efficacy as a central component, SCT often is mislabeled as Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 2010). Self-efficacy can be broken into the three subcomponents of behavior, environment, and person factors, although these components are unequal (Bandura, 1997). Behavior is a product of the environment, as well as the individual's personal beliefs. Those with high self-efficacy believe in their ability to change their environment, or to at least find ways to work within their environment to achieve a desired outcome. This belief generally exists independent of the actual results. While environmental factors cannot be ignored, individuals believe they are not obligated to them. Therefore, self-efficacy, involves individuals' thoughts that their ability is paramount, but not

necessarily that which they actually achieve.

*Self-Efficacy, Ritual, and Social Cognitive Theory*

Ritual fits into this framework due to its ability to move individuals from one social sphere to another, and its unifying effect on groups who share this common experience. Ritual also can be expressed through the use of symbols and ceremonies intended to convey meaning, some overt and others secret (Gusfield & Michalowicz, 1984; Merelman, 1988). These help to differentiate a group from the greater whole by establishing a unique identity to which all members assent (Van Gennep, 2004).

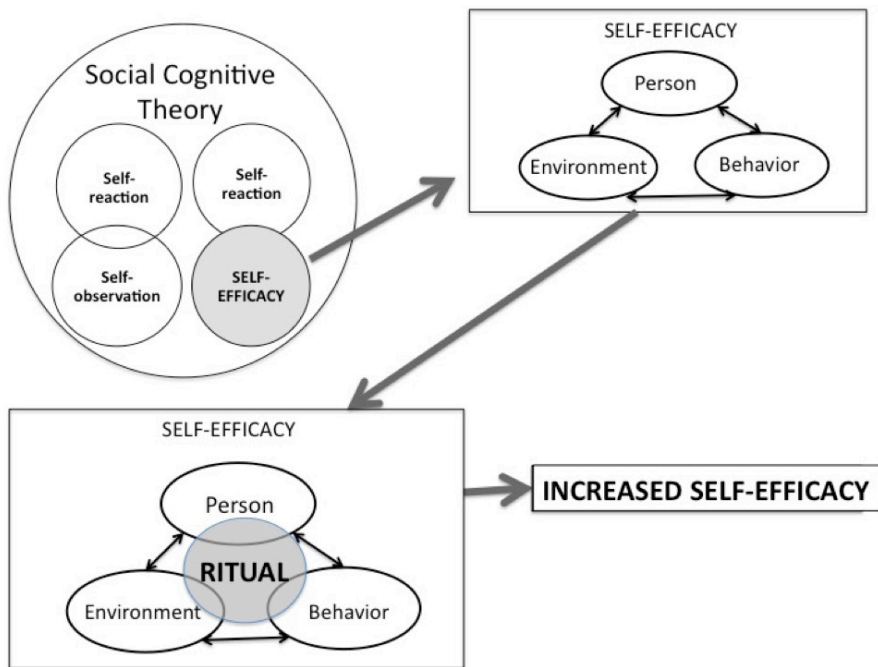
Ritual touches on each of the three subcomponents that make up the self-efficacy model. Symbols and ceremonies occur in the environment as tools for communicating shared val-

ues and norms to individual members. As participants understand and internalize the deeper meanings taught through rituals, they experience personal growth. As members adopt this new identity and as ritual is repeated, the effect of behavior, environment, and the individual on self-efficacy becomes self-reinforcing.

This motivation to act in a particular way, based on the adoption of new identities and values that are taught through rituals, aligns with SCT as a possible catalyst for developing self-efficacy. If rituals can engender feelings of empowerment and a greater self-worth, they likely can lead to greater self-efficacy due to increased self-confidence, as well as individual's belief in his or her ability to control and direct positive outcomes. Figure 1 illustrates the relation of self-efficacy to the larger field of SCT and depicts the role of ritual in increasing self-efficacy.

**Figure 1**

*Study Theoretical Framework. The figure depicts SCT as the beginning point for the theoretical framework. Self-efficacy, a component of SCT, is comprised of three areas that interrelate: person, environment, and behavior. Ritual touches each of these areas. This study proposed that the introduction of ritual leads to an increase in self-efficacy.*



## Review of the Literature

### *Greek-Letter Organization Membership*

With over four million women at 655 higher education institutions across the United States affiliated with the National Panhellenic Conference (National Panhellenic Council, 2015), understanding the experience of sorority women is necessary given the resources dedicated to membership. Membership in fraternities or sororities has been found to contribute to positive learning in college due to the peer effects of involvement (Astin, 1993). This outcome likely is in part due to the increased sense of community engendered by sorority membership, which is gained and reinforced through ritual (Astin, 1975). Beyond the reported increases in self-efficacy noted previously, many benefits of sorority membership have been cited, including leadership and personal development, campus and civic engagement, and social capital procurement (Asel, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2009; Bureau, Ryan, Ahen, Shoup, & Torres, 2011; DeBard & Sacks, 2010; Hayek, Carini, & Kuh, 2002; Witkowski, 2010). However, results from the longitudinal Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education (WNS) have revealed conflicting data as membership in Greek-letter organizations were found to have no effect of the constructs measured, critical thinking, moral reasoning, the development of intercultural competence, inclination to inquire and lifelong learning, and psychological well-being (Hevel & Bureau, 2014; Martin, Hevel, Asel, & Pascarella, 2011). Further analysis of the data revealed conditional effects on the WNS constructs based on “students’ entering academic abilities and their racial/ethnic identities” (Hevel, Martin, Weeden, & Pascarella, 2015, p. 456).

Studies on academic measures of achievement and success have been mixed; with some studies reporting higher grade point averages (DeBard & Sacks, 2010), and others reporting higher persistence, retention, and graduation rates despite lower grade point averages (Ahren, Bureau, Ryan, & Torres, 2014; Blimling, 1993;

DeBard, Lake, & Binder, 2006; Ethington & Smart, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Pike & Askew, 1990). In fact, students who exhibited the least commitment to their education, or to the school, derived the most benefit from fraternity and sorority membership (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979). Yet, there are drawbacks that accompany participation in sorority life, which have been shown to include higher rates of alcohol use (Wechsler, Kuh, & Davenport, 1996), increased participation in hazing events (Ellsworth, 2006), weak personal development (Wilder et al., 1986), and less exposure to student diversity, as well as campus diversity efforts and initiatives (Torbensohn & Parks, 2009).

While the positive and negative aspects of fraternity and sorority life have been substantiated in the literature, a study by Pike (2003) found that Greek-letter organization members achieved greater gains in academic and personal development than their peers who were not involved in a fraternity or sorority. While they may have reported lower levels of development, the increases made throughout their involvement were greater than their non-fraternity/sorority peers (Pike, 2003). With a focus on the positive aspects of sorority membership, this study sought to contribute to the literature related to the benefits of sorority involvement and to further understand the way in which participation in sorority rituals contributes to the development of self-efficacy.

### *Ritual*

Rituals are formalized ceremonies that communicate the values of the organization to new members, and to integrate members into the group (Gusfield & Michalowicz, 1984; Hermanowicz & Morgan, 1999; Merelman, 1988; Rothenbuhler, 1998; Van Gennep, 2004). Components of rituals include the following. Ritual: (1) is performed, which implies it is pre-planned and scripted; (2) is a visible action and not reserved only as an exercise of the mind; (3) is a

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conscious, voluntary act for participants that is not undertaken idly or merely as entertainment, it includes a deeper purpose and meaning behind it; (4) has a social component; (5) involves relationships to a larger group; (6) focuses on potential for being, and not necessarily on the status quo; (7) employs various symbols infused with meaning and are repetitive; it communicates something to the participants without explicitly stating what it is about; and (8) involves sacredness (Rothenbuhler, 1998).

Van Genneep (2004) was one of the earliest scholars to undertake a comprehensive review of ritual in its many forms and identified three basic stages in which to categorize them. The first is separation, whereby the initiates are symbolically removed from their prior life or community in preparation for joining a new one. The next stage is one of transition between worlds; this is followed by the third stage, incorporation. Tinto (1993) built upon this model to develop The Interactionist Theory. Fischer (2007) explained interactionist theory by stating that students must separate themselves from their former lives as a prerequisite to successfully integrating into campus life; otherwise, these former connections can interfere with their adjustment to their new life and subsequent success. Sorority rituals provide a tangible, explicit process of transition away from the former and toward a new community and sense of identity, which could impact self-efficacy by allowing sorority women to develop this new identity in a safe place that provides positive reinforcement.

Further evidence for a possible link between ritual and self-efficacy emerged from Chapple and Coon (1942), who explained the way that rituals help to put members back on an even keel after major life changes. It can bring individuals into balance within the new situation. For example, a death of someone close can cause severe disruptions in one's life and funeral rituals can help to bridge the gap between the individual's life as it was, and what is now must be. Sorority rituals can provide a similar re-framing for young

women transitioning from youth to adulthood, as they enter a new world separate apart from their families and home life. Some will struggle to adapt to their new role and surroundings; and rituals within the sorority can help to define and assume their new identity.

### *Self-Efficacy*

Self-efficacy is the extent to which an individual believes he or she can exercise control over actions, thinking, emotions, and events (Bandura, 1982). Individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy seek to resolve their own situations (Schwarzer & Renner, 2000). They are more likely to assume responsibility for the outcomes of their actions, as they believe they can influence these outcomes (Bandura, 1997). The ability to control or change thinking and feelings with regard to situations or dilemmas has been the topic of research for decades (Moore & Benbasat, 1991). Perceived self-efficacy was important in overcoming obstacles, defeats, and setbacks (Hawkins, 1992); and many journals featured meta-analysis research on self-efficacy across disciplines (Luszczynska, Scholz, & Schwarzer, 2005; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Again, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory has served as the theoretical framework for the majority of research on self-efficacy (Luszczynska et al., 2005), as well as for this study.

Researchers have identified a relationship between high perceived self-efficacy and innovation (Hulsheger, Anderson, & Salgado, 2009; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). One study of over 150 female collegiate leaders examined the ability for Social Cognitive Theory, in particular self-efficacy, to predict interest in leadership positions (Yeagley, Subich, & Tokar, 2010). The study found that self-efficacy and outcome expectations related positively to women seeking these positions. Student involvement studies abound, as do studies on sorority involvement. What is not published to date is a study design that attempts to identify and support the relationship between ritual participation and self-efficacy.

## Method

The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of sorority membership and ritual participation on the development of self-efficacy. Given the outcomes of rituals in sororities and their connection to the concepts of self-efficacy, an exploration of the specific involvement experience of sorority life was chosen as the focus of the study. The specific research question was: How does the sorority ritual experience influence the development of self-efficacy in women?

Given the lack of empirical research on sorority ritual participation and self-efficacy, the qualitative methodology of phenomenology was chosen to explore this relationship with collegiate sorority women (Creswell, 2013). Interviews and focus groups (see Appendix A) allowed for a rich description in exploring the relationship between ritual and self-efficacy by providing depth and flexibility in inquiry when framing the self-efficacy benefits of sisterhood and sorority life and the practice of sorority advisement (Patton, 2015). In phenomenological research, participants' perspectives are described and interpreted in order to understand the essence and structure of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Hycner, 1999; Moustakas, 1994) – in this case, the value placed on sorority ritual in terms of one's increased self-efficacy.

### Site

Participants were selected from a mid-size regional comprehensive research institution in Colorado. Fraternities and sororities are relatively new to this institution, with the oldest Greek-letter organization less than ten years. Total fraternity/sorority membership is less than 5% of the campus population, though it is increasing. Additionally, no common housing is provided for these groups, which is an important distinction of the site, given that ritual frequently occurs in the home of the organization. Fraternity and sorority life varies at campuses across the country, and the role of the community may

be an important influencing factor.

### Data Collection

Both one-on-one interviews and focus groups were utilized to collect data. Focus groups were advantageous due to participant interaction to build off of one another's thoughts, and the ability of the group setting to put respondents at ease about sharing information (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, 60 to 75-minute focus groups allowed for efficient data collection. However, as the flow and direction of the discussion was influenced by the group, one-on-one interviews also were conducted to provide a tool with which to triangulate data findings from the focus groups.

Prior to focus groups and interviews, participants were provided with consent forms detailing the purpose of the study and the data collection processes and procedures. A semi-structured protocol was developed outlining the areas to be explored in exploring sorority ritual participation and self-efficacy. The interview protocol was developed through the SCT framework by choosing questions that would elicit responses regarding the participants' perceived ability to affect change, as well as the effect of ritual on the perception of self. Questions specifically targeted the self-efficacy construct, which is the influence of belief in one's ability to accomplish goals. Adherence to the interview protocol ensured that questions were asked in a specific order and were carefully worded, and probing questions were embedded to provide opportunities to seek clarification and meaning (Patton, 2015). Focus groups were conducted on campus in a location familiar to the participants. One-on-one interviews were conducted both on and off campus at quiet locations to contribute to the individuals' comfort. The focus groups and interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed to ensure data accuracy (Creswell, 2013).

### Sampling Strategy and Participants

National Panhellenic Council sorority members were contacted for interview and focus



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**Table 1**

*Participant Information*

<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u> <u>Length</u> <u>(years)</u>	<u>Race/</u> <u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>AGE</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Major</u>	<u>Leadership</u> <u>Position(s)</u>	<u>Other</u> <u>Involvement</u>
Stacy	1.5	White	21	Sr	History	President	Intramural sports
Autumn	0.5	Black/ African- American	18	Fr	Psych & Leadership Comm	No formal role	Black Student Union, Swing Dance Club
Sally	1	White	21	Jr	Org & Strategic Comm	President	None
Rachel	2	White	20	Jr	Psych & Criminal Justice	Philanthropy Chair, Vice President Governing Board	Video Game Club
Beatrice	2.5	Multi- racial	21	Sr	History, Teaching	Philanthropy Chair	Teacher Program
Megan	2	White	19	Soph	Chemistry & Physics	President Governing Board	Justice Mission, Live Action Role Play Club
Shelby	0.5	Hispanic/ Latina	18	Fr	Innovation	Membership Chair	Business Club
Patty	1.5	White	19	Soph	Business	Comm. Chair	None
Susan	3.5	White	20	Jr	International Business	Social Chair, Treasurer Governing Board	Society of Leadership, Sign-Lang. Club
Maureen	4	White	23	Sr	English	Philanthropy Chair	Religious Club
Kathy	0.5	Hispanic/ Latina	20	Jr	Sociology	No formal role	Religious Club
Janet	40	White	N/A	N/A	N/A	National Volunteer	N/A

group participation upon approval from the Institutional Review Board. Intensity sampling was utilized to select participants; this method used cases that strongly demonstrated the area of interest (Patton, 2015). Individuals were invited to participate in interviews and focus groups based on their involvement in the sorority. All sorority officers were invited to participate in the study via email. Twelve women initially were contacted; from those, seven were included in the study.

A snowball sampling technique was utilized to increase variation by encouraging participants to suggest women they thought may be interested. This resulted in four additional participants; thus, the two focus groups were composed of a total of 11 women. All participants self-identified as female, ranged in age from 18 to 23 years, represented the campus racial/ethnic demographics, and varied in the length of affiliation with their sorority, from six months to four years. While



the involvement level varied, all held some sort of leadership role within their sorority with the exception of one individual, and most were involved in additional student activities.

Two one-on-one interviews were held, which served as a tool to triangulate data findings that surfaced in the focus groups. This process ensured that the group dynamic did not negatively influence participant responses. One focus group participant and one local alumna were invited to participate. The focus group participant had belonged to her sorority for less than a year and was rather quiet during the focus group. The alumna had been involved with her sorority for 40 years and was selected because she had been a leader at the national level of her sorority for many of those years. Due to her experience and convictions, she was considered a subject matter expert. These individuals were selected based on their experience in order to add variation to the sample. Table 1 summarizes key information of

the participants.

### *Data Analysis*

A phenomenological approach was utilized for the data analysis of the interview and focus group transcriptions by focusing on the systematic application of this method for coding credibility and dependability (Creswell, 2013; Hycner, 1999; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological reduction method was used to develop a synthesis of the meanings and essences in order to explore the relationship between sorority ritual participation and self-efficacy. To begin, the researchers engaged in reflexivity to foster dialogue on the preconceptions, beliefs, values, and assumptions each brought to the study to mitigate them in the analysis process. Open coding of significant statements was conducted by horizontalization, reviewing each statement with equal value. Approximately 50 unique codes were developed by each research-

**Table 2**

*Code Mapping Process*

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Significant Statements from Transcriptions and Open Coding

<u>Sisterhood</u>	<u>Values</u>	<u>Impact</u>
Support	Responsibility	Public Contribution
Role-Models	Pride	Civic Attitude
Social Connection	Identity	Paradigm Shift
Networking Opportunities	Integrity	Empowering Action

<u>Ritual Effect</u>	<u>Self-Efficacy</u>
Pride	Self-Aware
Motivation	Self-Respect
Shared Experience	Personal Growth
Communal Meaning	Academic Development
	Inspired

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Textural Descriptions from Significant Statements

The effect of ritual leads to influences on the person, their behavior, and ultimately their environment, these influences lead to greater self-efficacy.

<u>Person</u>	<u>Behavior</u>	<u>Environment</u>
Internalized Values	Sisterly Bonding	Impact and Innovate

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er; through parsimony and refinement, 44 open codes were consensually established.

Researchers then collectively revisited the transcriptions and codes and identified five significant statements: (1) sisterhood, (2) values, (3) impact, (4) ritual effect, and (5) self-efficacy. From the five significant statements, textural descriptions of the relationship between sorority ritual and self-efficacy were identified based on the SCT theoretical framework: environment, person, and behavior. Thus, the essence of the data findings was: the effect of ritual leads to influences on the person, their behavior, and ultimately their environment, these influences lead to greater self-efficacy. See Table 2 for a code mapping of the data analysis.

### *Study Trustworthiness*

In order to confirm accuracy of the perceptions and meanings shared by the interviewees regarding sorority ritual participation and self-efficacy, five of the Creswell and Miller (2000) validation strategies were employed in building study trustworthiness. As a means with which to engage in peer review and debriefing, Moustakas' (1994) data reduction method was utilized to ensure dependability in the coding process across researchers. Random member-checking also was employed for interpretive confirmation of the textual descriptions and essence of the findings through open-ended follow-up interviews, in which reactions and clarification were sought on the credibility of the findings from the participants (Creswell, 2013). The outcome of the member-checking confirmed the findings of the study. Rich, thick descriptions also were employed to provide transferability of the findings. Additionally, triangulation was achieved through verifying study findings of the focus groups with one-on-one interviews. Last, the potential biases of each researcher were acknowledged through the researcher reflexivity process, noting previous ritual participation which could factor into the research analysis of this study.

### *Limitations*

Data collection was limited to one university and due to the limited sorority community at the institution, the number of eligible participants was small. While the participants' demographics (racial/ethnic background, age, year in school, and number of years in their organization) were representative of the campuses' sorority population, the sample may not be reflective of national NPC statistics. The context of the study should be considered by readers as sorority membership represented a small portion of the student population (5% of the population, including both fraternities and sororities) and there was limited historical grounding of Greek-letter organizations on the campus (less than ten years). Yet, the uniqueness of the sorority community made this an interesting phenomenological study to pursue. In the future, additional institutions could be included with a greater number of participants. Despite these limitations, the data trustworthiness section documents the robustness of the study.

### *Ethics*

The examination of sorority ritual is a delicate matter for participants, as it is a private, sacred event. Further, two of the researchers are sorority members, which introduced the possibility of bias into the study. In order to protect against inadvertent disclosure of private information, the scope of the study was explained prior to each focus group and interview and it was made clear to the participants that they were not required to divulge any information that would make them uncomfortable. All data that was gathered was de-identified through the use of pseudonyms to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Also, as three of the researchers had no prior experience with sorority ritual, the inclusion of these individuals served as an effective check for potential bias. Additionally, fellow members were involved at each stage to check one another's research fidelity which provided an effective method to ensure ethical procedures were followed.

## Findings

Through the code-mapping process, five significant statements emerged: sisterhood, values, impact, ritual effect, and self-efficacy. Table 3 describes each significant statement and illustrates the frequency within the transcripts. The frequency generally was consistent across the focus groups and interviews. Thus, the significant statements and textual descriptions were interconnected and organized by the strongest observed connection. The textual descriptions were a by-product of the theoretical framework which defined the study design.

The textural descriptions were interdependent with one another, as they originated from the effect of ritual and aligned with the self-efficacy components of person, behavior, and environment. Ritual effect was a significant statement that crossed categories—any outcomes directly attributed to ritual by the participants. Janet described the effect of ritual by stating, “The ritual helps to build self-esteem and walk your faith.” Additionally, ritual was described as a sacred act that bonded sisters across generations, as noted by Stacy:

Our ritual was adopted in 1867 and it’s never changed since 1867 and so, just to think our founders said the same ritual that we say every week. They said that every week too when they were starting and I think it’s

amazing that it’s been kept a secret for over [150] years and that women have said the same things that I’m saying and they’ve felt the same way that I feel.

The ritual effect category overlapped with all of the other significant statements, in that it served as the impetus for sisterhood, values, impact and ultimately, self-efficacy. Within ritual effect, participants discussed the ways in which rituals made them feel a sense of pride and motivation, as well as a shared experience that led to a communal meaning of sorority membership. Likewise, self-efficacy emerged throughout the data and was illustrated in comments relating to self-awareness, self-respect, personal growth, academic development, and inspiration. Rachel shared, “I would say the things I’ve gotten through ritual and my relationships [with my sisters] have directly impacted my self-efficacy . . . by being willing to try new things and take action.” Sally also noted, “This support system that you have to help you carry out whatever you are wanting to do makes you feel more confident.” Thus, participants related their internalized values (person) to their sisterly bonding (behavior), which directly influenced their ability to impact and to innovate in their surroundings (environment).

### *Person: Internalized Values*

Internalized values encapsulated the tex-

**Table 3**  
*Significant Statement Details*

Theme	Frequency	Description
Sisterhood	159	A bond, connection, or sense of community in the sisterhood
Values	122	Expressed values, standards, or ideals of the sorority are internalized and ownership takes place
Impact	38	Impact that results in the transformation of ideas into action
Ritual Effect	59	Any outcomes directly attributed to ritual
Self-Efficacy	90	Knowledge and belief regarding one’s abilities to master a situation and to produce a positive outcome

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tural description category of person, the positive impact of the sorority/ritual experience, as evidenced by women transitioning from outsider to new member to one who had fully adopted the values of the sorority. Ritual affected participants' views of self and influenced their attitudes, actions, and interactions. Internalized values included feelings of pride in the sorority and fostered a sense of responsibility for upholding its principles. Shelby noted that her new found pride in being a member of her sorority led her to believe it was "the best decision she ever made," with others in the focus group echoing her sentiment through nods. Participants shared at length about the responsibility of living up to their values and ensuring their behavior was in alignment; one noted the importance of "walking with integrity." The president of one sorority discussed her feeling that it is inappropriate to party every weekend due to her leadership role in the sorority: "I want people to look at me and say she's a leader, she's involved on campus, and I'll take that with me once I'm done with college too." Hence, her position increased her awareness of her role as a representative of the sorority and the new identity she assumed as a result of it.

The importance of internalizing the values of the sorority were directly tied to ritual by all participants. Beatrice remarked, "If you didn't believe in what you're saying [during ritual], you should not be there," to which other participants vigorously agreed. All believed that the sorority values expressed and highlighted through ritual led to members assuming a new identity as described by Janet: "You take the ritual, you take an oath, and you obey the oath." This was not stated by way of explanation, but rather as an assertive statement by Janet to emphasize the importance of maintaining the commitments honored through ritual. Maureen shared: "The more you say it, the more you will learn it and take it to heart." Learning to internalize the values of the sorority resulted naturally in a change of behavior as participants began to relate to themselves and to others as sisters.

### *Behavior: Sisterly Bonding*

The behavior textual description category of sisterly bonding referred to relationships as well as ritual symbols and artifacts of the sorority. Significant statements of sisterhood included support, role-models, social connections, and networking opportunities. Behavior expectations were communicated through ritual that influenced the sisterly relationships and atmosphere of the sorority. Ritual was described in opaque terms, such as secrecy and sacred, but it became clear that these factors contributed to the foundation of sisterly bonding. Patty explained, "It's cool that you have this secret thing that no one else knows. Then learning that no one else knows it, it gives you a deeper connection with those girls." That connection led to behaviors that demonstrated participants had internalized the values of the sorority and had acted in a sisterhood where in which supported and even sustained one another.

Furthermore, the concept of sisterhood referred to a deep connection with sorority sisters and the supportive community generated by that connection. Maureen said, "Without that ritual, without our secrets, I guess you don't have that common connection." This sense of community was deepened by participation in rituals, the values communicated through rituals, and the secrecy of them. Sally remarked, "We wouldn't have any organization; we wouldn't have any, anything without our rituals which it makes it really valuable and important." Beatrice shared, "It's really nice to know that we're bonded throughout the country. That all our girls are believing in the same thing and saying the same thing and believing in those words that we're saying." The shared experience of ritual served as a foundation for supporting one another's individual growth and development.

Participants also discussed that they became more self-aware as a result of their sorority membership. Stacy shared:

I was sort of this insecure person . . . now  
I know what I'm good at, I know what I'm

not good at and I'm not afraid to admit those things . . . I'm not afraid to step up and be like "no, I'm really good at that and I'll handle this, but you can help me with this part of it." It really taught me, meeting these women who I'm now sisters with, who I am.

Others shared feeling the support of their sisters and the general sisterhood. Megan remarked, "Now that I'm in a sorority I have the support of all my alums and all of our chapter members and all of their friends and family so it just extends the impact [since] we have that connection." Additionally, Patty shared that it "makes me more confident in who I am. I've always known I can do things, but knowing I have 60 other women supporting me is great." This sense of community led many to believe they had the power and support to impact and to innovate their environment in positive ways that increased their self-efficacy.

### *Environment: Impact and Innovate*

Impact and innovate defined the environment textural description category; as a result of ritual, participants internalized the values and contributed to a sisterhood that led them to act and to think in empowering ways about their environment. Ritual affected participants' views on the contribution they could make on their college campus as well as the larger community, which led to a paradigm shift and the development of a more civic attitude. Thus, participants' beliefs that they had the power to impact and to innovate in their environment led them to grow and to change in empowering ways. All participants shared a story of growth or change that influenced their self-efficacy. A few noted changing their major to a field that was a better fit for them, as well as enjoying campus life to a greater extent as a result of sorority membership. Others discussed their development as leaders from assuming new opportunities in the sorority and on campus to enhancing their organizational, listening, and cooperative skills. Sally

stated, "It's given me an opportunity to know I have a voice that others will listen to." Shelby also noted that she developed a greater ability to trust others as a result of her membership. She said, "I was always the type that said 'no, I'll just get it done' and now I've changed and will actually give people jobs and trust them . . . trusting your sisters to get things done is great." Several participants connected this type of growth to their sisterhood, which culminated in an impact on their environment.

Additionally, participants' beliefs that they possessed the power to innovate and to impact led them to become more civically involved in their campus and local community. Nearly all individuals discussed planning chapter activities, such as community service events or fundraisers. Megan provided an example of impact outside the sorority when she reported on establishing a new organization on campus. Other women spoke more conceptually about the way in which "power in numbers" enabled them to take action and provided an opportunity to make a greater impact. Kathy noted, "Having a sense of belonging to something a lot bigger than yourself is really important to me and I think it's going to help me make an impact in the future." The prominent connection in this category was that support from the sorority community enhanced the personal functioning and self-esteem of the participants and in turn, empowered members, both individually and collectively, to take action and to positively influence their environment.

### **Discussion and Recommendations**

Initial findings supported the selection of SCT as the theoretical framework for this study, which provided an excellent model to analyze the data and interpret the results. Social cognitive theory has been used extensively in many studies, which illustrates the thoroughness of the model and its proven applicability to human behavior. The robustness of the theory lent confidence to the

approach taken in this study (Calantone, Harmancioglu, & Droge, 2010; Choi, Sung, Lee, & Cho, 2011; Redmond, 2010). All components of self-efficacy were present in the findings, and ritual appeared to influence the person, environment, and behavior of sorority women. These factors worked in a cyclical nature to continue to influence the development of self-efficacy and the ability to make an impact. Findings demonstrated the strength of the sorority community in impacting individual beliefs to increase self-efficacy. Interviewees attributed their self-assurance and perceived the ability to accomplish a task to be directly related to their sorority involvement. Sorority leaders and their advisors can use the shared impact of the sorority experience when encouraging students to participate in the recruitment process.

One challenge experienced in the study was the separation of the influence of ritual from the influence of sorority participation in general. Based on responses, this was not possible at this stage. Autumn described ritual by saying, "It's like the difference between family and friends... it [ritual] separates sororities from clubs, that's what makes it special." When specifically asked whether it was ritual or access to the group that provided the benefits, Susan said, "it's both... you can't separate them." The overall sorority experience appeared to have positively contributed to the development of self-efficacy, and the sorority experience was found to be interconnected with ritual. However, it was unclear to what extent perceptions of self-efficacy were attributable to ritual alone. As students articulated that participation in ritual and their sorority experience were intertwined, advisors should continue to provide support for the ritual experience as it is the aspect of the sorority experience that differentiates Greek-letter organizations from other opportunities for group development in college, such as intramural sports teams, residence hall communities, and student organizations.

While the findings of this study showed ritual effects to have been positive, the potential nega-

tive effects also were apparent. Conflicts can arise when ritual promotes an unhealthy or unsafe environment, or the values of the sorority are not in alignment with personal values. Interviewees asked participants about potentially negative effects of ritual. Patty shared that the pressure for correct ritual was sometimes stressful, and Susan expressed frustration when other members' actions were not in alignment with ritual. However, most commented only on the positive aspects of ritual, yet, it was not possible to determine whether that was due to their personal beliefs or the nature of the study.

Additionally, a challenge was experienced in determining whether participation in a sorority contributed to the increase in self-efficacy, or whether individuals with high self-efficacy were drawn to sorority participation, a similar challenge in research related to outcomes of Greek-letter organization membership noted by Hevel and Bureau (2014). The findings appeared to suggest that the ritual experience influenced the development of self-efficacy. Specifically, interview participants varied in their level of confidence when joining the sorority. Patty spoke about "going looking for the [sorority] table" and getting involved immediately, whereas Susan, Autumn, Shelby, and Kathy shared stumbling into it and not feeling confident when they began. These women were in very different places, yet all attributed growth to their sorority membership. This appeared to indicate that, no matter the starting place, sorority membership had a positive impact on the development of self-efficacy and the ability to make an impact.

The findings from this qualitative study reveal the "what" and "how" of the influence of sorority involvement, specifically participation in ritual, on participants' increased self-efficacy. On the measures studied in a recent quantitative-based study, no effect was found on critical thinking, moral reasoning, development of intercultural competence, inclination to inquire and lifelong learning, and psychological well-being as a result of Greek-letter organization membership

(Hevel, Martin, Weeden, & Pascarella, 2015). Probing further into the experiences of sorority members uncovers more about the unique aspects of their involvement that have not yet been explored and which cannot be explained through

quantitative surveys alone. Additional qualitative research is recommended to understand what aspects of the sorority experience contribute to various learning and developmental outcomes.

## APPENDIX A

### Student Involvement

1. Can you tell me a little bit about how you are involved as a student, such what organizations are you involved with and what is your role within them? What has your experience been like?
2. What are the benefits of having participated in this/these organization(s)?
3. Have you changed through your participation? If yes, how so?

### Ritual

4. Does your sorority/fraternity have formal ceremonies or rituals for members only?
5. If yes, is there a difference between observing and participating?
6. How many times have you been an observer or active participant in your sorority/fraternity ritual?
7. How important is ritual to you?
8. How important is it to the members of your organization?
9. What kinds of thoughts or feelings does observing participating trigger for you?
10. What are the benefits of having a ritual?
11. Does participation in a ritual benefit you? Can you describe how?
12. Generally, rituals express some values or beliefs. Do you agree with the values or beliefs expressed through our organization's ritual?

### Self-Efficacy

13. Are you familiar with the term self-efficacy?
14. If no, describe it...



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15. If yes, can you share with me your definition of it?

16. Please share with me your definition of social impact.

### Connecting Questions

17. Do you believe there is a relationship between self-efficacy and ritual participation?

18. What do you see as the major benefits of being a sorority member when it comes to your ability to make a social impact?

### Demographic Questions

19. Gender

20. Age

21. Years of post-high school education

22. Years in sorority/fraternity

23. Major/Minor

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